

15 July 1981

NOTE FOR: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Robert M. Gates

SUBJECT : Computerization of Key Estimates

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1. Attached is a note from [] and a package of materials relating to the use of computers in maintaining key estimates.

2. I do not believe what NFAC has available is responsive to the Director's request. It seems to me that his principal objective is for NFAC to have information and analysis in the computer which would enable him on just a few minutes notice to obtain a computer-printed, up-to-date status report and estimate of trends relating to a priority subject.

3. I am told that NFAC's CMASS Program cannot do this. I also am close to being persuaded that NFAC is not trying very hard to accommodate this request. And, finally, I am not at all certain that present requirements justify building such a program. I can see, for example, the Director getting last minute word of an NSC meeting for which he must depart in 15 minutes and the virtue of him being able to call John McMahon, who in turn could have an analyst punch a button and have the kind of status report and estimate described above by the computer in five minutes. But these circumstances occur very rarely.

4. I am inclined to believe that the Director sees this as a cost-effective and efficient way of maintaining a fast readout capability on high priority subjects so that when questions about these subjects arise, analysts need not be diverted from other work for a quick turnaround report. In this sense, the idea has real merit. As was described last night, very often analysts will be diverted from research work or special projects in order simply to put something together in preparation for a meeting.

5. The bottom line: whether to try and make NFAC's CMASS system on Central America a pilot program for this kind of project and limit expenditure of money and people to the greatest extent possible; to try and fulfill the Director's request, that is, by developing such a capability on a number of priority intelligence topics; or simply to hope that the Director forgets about his request. With respect to the latter, only this morning he reminded John McMahon that the latter had promised him papers on each of the national intelligence topics showing where we stand substantively. If, as I expect, you think we should pursue the first of these options, then NFAC will require a well targetted boot to get them moving and responsive. It also will require several tests in which you or the Director call in a requirement for such a paper and give them only ten or fifteen minutes to respond--thus forcing them to rely on what is already in the computer.

6. Your guidance is requested: How much of this trip really is necessary?

Robert M. Gates